

Cameroon's State Bilingualism: Mending Fences between Linguistic Communities

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Abstract : From the time of the biblical story of the Tower of Babel, languages as well as people have learnt to co-exist. It is obvious that when languages co-exist, there is the inevitable tendency of linguistic influence. This is because a language can either be a unifying factor or a factor of division within a given community, especially in a multicultural and multi-linguistic community where such a situation has led to socio-political and economic tension. Thus, leaders of such communities have a duty to plan and implement a language policy that will meet the needs of all members of the community in order to enhance its corporateness. The present article will focus on some of the major reasons that prompted the government of Cameroon to embark on an official bilingual policy after independence in 1961 and then evaluate the evolution of the linguistic situation. The article will equally look at the consequences, especially on a socio-political platform and what today has been termed 'the Anglophone problem' in Cameroon which has caused a fuse between the country's minority Anglophone population and the majority Francophone administration. Data for the present article is collected from literature on the state of official bilingualism in Cameroon, newspapers articles on the prevailing situation in the country and interviews with actors on the field.

Keywords : language policy, linguistic influence, multicultural, official bilingualism, socio-political tension

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